



# The Edge of Power



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## Chapter 1 by Dustin Eves

Prince Memorial Hospital, Hawaii

Brain surgeons don't usually sport pink hair so bright you'd think it was glowing. They're also not usually in their early twenties, as it can take eight to twelve years just to earn a doctorate degree. Many surgeons are skinny, but few if any are so grotesquely tall and thin that the knobby parts of their bones poke out like large rats being digested in a python's belly.

This is precisely why Eleanora Gibbs, Prince's emergency room receptionist, was hesitant to allow a man fitting this exact description access to a patient with potentially fatal brain damage. The pink-haired man had waltzed right through the waiting room's front doors, calling himself a doctor and demanding access to the emergency operating rooms.

"I don't care where you say you completed your residency; I've never seen you in here before. Until I see a doctor I'm familiar with and receive verbal authorization, I cannot let you through those doors." Eleanora's voice was losing its usual plastered-on professional tone.

"I'm telling you, miss," the wiry young man said, a slimy arrogance coating every syllable, "my name is Doctor Cushing, and I'm the surgeon called in to assist with the emergency procedure on Edge Antioch. The man is dying of severe trauma to the brain, and if you refuse to let me pass, I am left with no other option than to thrust you aside and find the operating room myself." Elenora, or 'El,' as she was known by a few of her co-workers, heaved a sigh of frustration. Well, it wasn't really a sigh so much as a phlegm-filled, deep guttural grunt muffled only slightly by a tremendous pursing of her bright red, lipstick-caked lips. It was this exact sound, along with her elephantine girth and earth-shaking foot stomps initiated when she was upset that earned her the nickname "El Toro" to the rest of her co-workers. "The Bull."

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that the troubled teen with bullets puncturing his lungs gets priority over their own extreme case of the hiccups.

"You don't look like any surgeon I've ever seen in my entire life, and there's no way, even if you are, that you are so experienced as to merit a call to perform such a serious operation."

"So you admit it's quite serious," he oozed, inching close enough to the Bull so as to indicate that he was not the least bit intimidated by her. "You'd think in such dire circumstances, a brain surgeon would be allowed to help out!" his chest was now mere centimeters from the receptionist's wide nose, and he glared straight down to meet her stony gaze. "Just what do you need to see to let me through?"

El paused for a second to think, determination still carved into her large face despite the apparent and unusual boldness of her opponent. She quickly came up with the most impossible idea she could think of.

"Well, I suppose Doctor Reed, one of Prince's most revered surgeons, would have to walk through those front doors and give you his personal endorsement. I don't think, however, that that will be happening any time soon as Doctor Reed is vacationing in Jamaica this month."

The smugness wafting from her face was thick enough to suffocate a rhinoceros.

The skeletal man in the doctor's smock would have pushed right past the receptionist, but her hulking frame filled nearly every inch of the doorway that led to each of the numerous operating rooms. He had marveled at her ability to get through that same doorway in a manner that seemed almost graceful when she had come from behind her desk and out into the lobby to confront him. He cleared his throat in what he hoped was an 'I mean business' sort of way.

"I don't think you truly realize the seriousness of the situation, ma'am. Mr. Antioch's life is hanging delicately by a thread. His head injury needs immediate medical attention, and I've been called in as an expert in Neurosurgery to assist in this crucial operation. If you do not let me pass, a man may die. Trust me; you do not want a man's death on your hands."

Determination and anger were now wrestling to become the dominant expression on El's face.

"All of the best neurosurgeons in Hawaii are already here, and some of them are among the best in the country. There's no reason why they would need to call anyone else to help, no matter how famous the patient is!"

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He was beginning to believe he'd have to resort to a display of superior talent. He whipped back toward the receptionist, anger taking hold of his actions.

"Look, I need to see Antioch, and I'll see him now!"

El Toro stared defiantly back at him, her eyes coated in pure rage, and propelled herself forward in order to smash the belligerent phony physician into the tile floor.

Then, if it was even possible, the man seemed to almost instantly get thinner. El threw on the brakes mid-charge, sliding a few more inches forward for lack of traction, and blinked a few times to check her vision. This was not possible.

The man's entire body seemed to stretch upward and he gained a full foot in height within a half second. El shrieked and backed toward the emergency room door.

"I don't know what you are, but you are not getting near anyone behind these doors." Her voice trembled, but her stance was firm and unwavering. She would not let a monstrosity harm people who had already been through so much physical anguish.

Then, behind the taffy-like man, the waiting room's automatic front doors flew open and threw themselves to the floor with a deafening crackle of thunder. The doors were mostly glass, and clear shards spilled over the floor. The pink-haired man snapped like a rubber band back to his original height and whirled to face the newly door-less entryway. A bulky man with shocking blue eyes in a black knee-length overcoat strode purposefully into the waiting room.

"He's with me. Let us through immediately," the man breathed in a gentle voice that didn't quite seem to fit his large stature or the urgency he had apparently intended.

El's bottom jaw sunk as she stared on in disbelief.

"Doctor...Reed...no, it can't..." El's eyes scanned the ground and took in the splintered glass and warped metal door frames. "Why...umm...I mean, you're back early? What just happened to the door?"

"Yes, there's no time for explanation, just let us see Edge."

"But this man is...well, not a doctor at all...I don't even think he's human, you should have seen..."

Elenora's voice trailed off and her eyes drifted to the enormous cavity in the wall, then she turned toward the emaciated man calling himself Doctor Cushing. His expression was a mix of hatred and victory with conceited satisfaction sprinkled on top. She begrudgingly took a step

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she was positive the man was dangerous.

The mismatched pair of men walked through the door and down the hallway. El followed for a few steps, then turned to head back to her desk.

"Elenora," Doctor Reed called back down the hallway.

El froze. She poked her head through the opening in the wall that separated her office space from the hospital hallway. Her face exuded surprise and her heart was touched in a way she had never experienced, yet she was not exactly comfortable with it. She held on to the delicate silence for a second longer, then Doctor Reed shattered it.

"Thank you!" he said, with a great glob of gratitude saturating the eight-letter pronouncement. In all her time at the hospital, even when he had on rare occasions acknowledged she existed, Elenora was sure Doctor Reed had never thanked her for anything, let alone called her by her full first name. Something was definitely wrong.

Once they were sure El was no longer watching, the two men ducked into an empty hospital room.

"Griffin, where were you? I was about to sling shot that titanic oaf to Molokai."

"There's no time to talk. Denton and about three others are here, already in the hospital."

"What! How? There's no way they could have gotten here before us!"

"They have methods. Tricks we still don't know about, I..."

"Why didn't you do something?"

"Listen to me for one second, please!" Griffin shouted, then immediately looked around to be sure he hadn't garnered any unwanted attention. He reduced the volume on his voice to a loud whisper.

"I'm only one man, Zander, I wasn't about to take on four of them out in the open. I followed until they broke in through a door near radiology, then I zapped it to weld it shut so they can't get out that way. That's when I realized I was probably leaving you hanging for a little longer than I should, and ran back here to help."

"Your job is to eliminate any problems immediately and clean up later, not just to slow them down. I will not fail today!"

Zander was livid. He shook with fury, his new anger combining with the remnants of it he had

not yet completely extinguished from the encounter with El moments before. His neon hair vibrated like the bristles of a sonic boom as he began his ferocious rant, speaking slowly through grinding incisor.

"Edge Antioch could be the only person in the world who could guarantee we never fall upon inconveniences like Denton again. We're taking him now!"

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Zander shot out of the room and into the hallway, throwing secrecy and caution to the wind. If Denton was here, Zander's plan was already void. Griffin started into a hard lope to catch up. "What makes Edge so different from every other potentate? He's a surf bum, and absolute idiot! There's no reason to believe the serum can change that."

A young orderly with light blonde hair, green eyes and a large metal badge on his coat appeared through the doorway on the right, halting Zander's dash.

"Excuse me, can I assist you gentlemen with anything? We're just getting ready to..."

"...fly!" shouted Zander as his arms extended like bungee cords, latched onto the puzzled boy and launched him up and away through a hanging ceiling panel. Panels trembled, shook and tore in rapid succession until the boy fell back through the ceiling and collided with the floor twenty meters away, bleeding from the top of his head and unconscious.

Zander twisted back around to Griffin, any logic that had ever been visible in his eyes replaced with maniacal insanity.

"See! The serum helped me do that! Me, of all people! Do you remember what I was? How pathetic I was? Without the serum, I was just like Edge in a way, only his unique situation puts him in a position to be even more powerful than me in ways we need the most. If things work out how I think they will, we will need no one else!"

A glistening drop of drool drizzled out from the left corner of Zander's snarl, which was now seemingly etched into his rubbery face.

Griffin stared at the poor orderly, horrified at what his friend had done. This was not at all how things were supposed to happen. Zander used to have a purpose. He'd had a goal, something noble that he believed in, but now it seemed he cared about nothing but his own power and increasing it. If he couldn't gain a specific talent for himself, he wanted desperately to control someone else who did possess it. Griffin knew this whole ordeal was certainly getting out of hand, but he didn't feel like now was the time to poke the upset pit bull with a proverbial stick. If simply entering in on a scene at the wrong moment incurred Zander's wrath, directly opposing him would be fatal. Griffin said nothing and followed his demented superior as best he could, jogging to keep up with a man who could stretch his legs so that each stride took him as far as four normal steps.

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knob snapped completely off the steel door, leaving a perfectly round opening. Ramming his entire gooey body into the hole, he entered the room like a boiled egg being sucked into a jar. Griffin stood back and gave the madman room to do his thing. Shrill screams, sickening cracks, and thundering bangs issued from inside the room, but Griffin didn't have the slightest desire to look through the skinny window. He had already seen enough violence for one night. When the noises dissipated, the door was ripped off its hinges and launched into the hallway, piercing and demolishing plaster as it smashed into the opposite wall, then fell to the tile floor.

"Griffin!" A harsh, squeaky roar flooded out of the now gaping hole in the wall. When his body was stretched to extreme proportions, Zander's vocal chords changed shape as well.

Depending on the shape his neck was in at any given time, his voice could sound very high or extremely low-pitched. Zander had hoped to develop this interesting side effect into a new talent, the ability to change his voice and sound like anyone he wanted to. At this point, however, Griffin doubted Zander cared what he sounded like. He cared for nothing but the serum now. Griffin stepped closer to the door, not wanting to see the scene he knew was waiting for him in the operating room.

As he peeked around the jagged corner and into the room, his heart slid into his ankles. How could Zander have sunk so low? Bodies in white jackets lay strewn all over the floor, some of them unconscious, some writhing, and most of them bleeding. He saw thin, snaking masses sliding and shifting into different shapes and sizes, each originating from one particular white lab coat with Zander's neck poking out of the top. The neck was thin, yet a pink-haired head still balanced precariously on top. A tall table in the middle of the room held Edge Antioch, a blue sheet hiding most of his head.

"Zander..." He didn't know what else he could say.

"Give me the serum, Griffin!" Zander's voice had raised a few octaves, and the sound issuing from his mouth was now more of a glass-shattering siren than actual human speech. If he stretched his neck any further, only dogs would be able to hear him.

"You...no, I won't give it to you. Your brain isn't even working properly..."

"You will hand over the syringe, or you are no longer my second!" Zander was now lowering his head, bringing his voice pitch back down to around normal range.

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Griffin spurted his reply out of his throat, raspy sounds gurgling out through his lips even though the arms wrapped around him grew tighter by the second.

“You of all people know what that could mean! If you put me through any kind of traumatizing experience, you’ll only be increasing the chances that I grow more powerful than even you!” Zander’s face stretched horizontally and he emitted a long, low bellow. He slammed Griffin’s body into the disconnected door on the floor, pressing him face-first against it.

“I’ll kill you then, Griffin! When you’re gone all your pathetic power will be gone with you, as well as your opportunities to ever gain more! If you are now my enemy, you must be eliminated.” His lungs near collapsing and his vision going black, facial features shifting back to his normal appearance, Griffin managed to force out two more short words before he lost consciousness. “Friend...why?” A bright blue spark shot out of his mouth and connected with one of Zander’s arms as he collapsed onto the metal door.

Zander unwound his arms, releasing his victim and turning him on his back. He then continued pulling his own body back into its normal bony shape. He stared at Griffin, whose purple skin gradually changed to blue, then red as circulation slowly returned. His face looked fully normal again. Gone was the guise of Doctor Reed. This was the Griffin he’d known for nearly his entire life, short blonde hair topping a beefy head with a disproportionately small nose. Zander allowed a single tear to roll down his cheek. He released a regretful sigh, walked up to the lifeless form, and reached inside Griffin’s jacket.

Zander shrieked with angry disappointment, but this time not at what he had done to his old friend, but what he had done to the serum. Broken glass and a sticky dampness was all he could feel inside his former friend’s smock. He pulled both sides of the jacket open. Griffin’s collared shirt was wet, and shattered glass poked into his skin in numerous places. Each of the needles themselves were still covered by plastic sleeves, so Griffin hadn’t been directly injected.

Zander spotted one single fully-intact syringe in the corner of the jacket, where Griffin’s arm must have created a gap in which the glass tube could remain without being smashed. He snatched it up and ran back into the room, removing the lid and jamming the needle directly into Edge’s arm, not bothering to find a vein first. Edge’s body began flailing and thrashing severely, and he rolled off the hospital bed onto the floor alongside the doctors.

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proof of anything that had happened except a gaping hole for a front entrance and a sick feeling that would not go away.

The other patrons in the hospital had seen and heard the blast, and the woman in the muumuu was screaming repeatedly between large breaths from her oxygen mask. The sandy-haired boy was crying while his dad tried to comfort him with his one good arm. The dispatcher on the other end of the line could hear the commotion in the background, and it was for this reason, along with El's plea for someone to at least come and investigate the damage to the front door, that convinced the doubting operator to dispatch a police car to check out the situation. The second she hung up the phone, El heard a massive crash from somewhere down the hall. With or without the police, she had to investigate.

As she cautiously made her way down the hall, all the way down near the end she saw a crumple of white with two legs in pressed black slacks sticking out. This was already not looking good. She broke into a teetering and bouncy jog, but stopped short as she took in the scene on her left down the hallway out of the corner of her eye. Was that Doctor Reed on the floor? What was he on top of? And then, the entire picture came into focus, and she saw the giant hole in the wall. What was it with this person...or thing...that gave him an unending hatred of doors? She guessed that when this was all over, someone would be due for some serious therapy.

When she got closer, she realized that the man on the floor was definitely not Doctor Reed...at least not entirely. His nose was smaller, his hair blonde, and his eyebrows were thick and bushy. Then she caught a glimpse of the little shards of glass planted all over the man's chest. El screamed. The entire hallway shook as if it were about to collapse. The thin man who had earlier presented himself as Doctor Cushing stepped through the crumbling archway in the wall. "Excuse me, I'm operating in here. Could you please keep it down?" His voice sticky with sarcasm, Zander lifted his index finger to his rubbery lips as a snakelike "shhh" sound slithered out.

El turned and ran.

"Where are you going? Don't you want to stay and watch the show?"

Zander threw out his rubbery arms and caught El by the heel. She hit the floor with an earth-shaking thud. Desperate to get away, she clawed her way to the corner of the wall where the

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hanging on to broke off, and he shot down the hall like a rubber band, El acting like an anchor as he held on to her foot, stretched to his limit, then was propelled back again a ways, ending up next to El's massive form. He let go of the pudgy ankle and wrapped his arms multiple times around her, much like he had with Griffin, although he found that with El he couldn't get his arms around quite as many times.

"I've had enough of you!" He lifted the large receptionist into the air, using all the strength his enhanced body could muster, finding himself grunting with physical strain for the first time in a decade.

The higher he lifted her, the more Zander lost his grip on El. Slowly his arms began to slip and ricochet off the ceiling like a stretched sling shot that had been released.

"Maybe I've had a little too much of you," Zander grunted, struggling to keep his hold as El squirmed incessantly. His efforts were fruitless, however, and El tumbled to the floor. The crack of tiles ricocheted off the corridor walls. She had stopped moving.

Breathing heavily, Zander allowed his body to pull back into its normal shape. He turned back toward the hospital room to finish what he had come to do. There had definitely been too many distractions.

When he laid his eyes on the scene back at the hospital room, he gasped in shock. Zander filled the hospital with a furious, bellowing scream.

Edge Antioch's body was gone.

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